

Dedication sermons 1 vol. All Baptists
Stephens & Co. Providence R.I.
bought of Car & M.
Andover New England Theological Library
Nov 18 1833
B-P
703

S E R M O N

PREACHED SEPTEMBER 14, 1796,

AT THE

DEDICATION
OF THE
MEETING-HOUSE

BELONGING TO THE CATHOLIC BAPTIST
SOCIETY IN

CUMBERLAND.

By JONATHAN MAXCY, A.M.
PRESIDENT OF RHODE-ISLAND COLLEGE

3887

PROVIDENCE: Printed by CARTER and WILKINSON,
and sold at their Book-Store, opposite the Market.

M.DCC.XCVI.

S E E M O U

EXCHANGED WITH OTHER BOOKS

AT THE

DEDICATION

MEETING

OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

IN THE

CUMBERLAND

BY THE REV. J. H. HARRIS

MINISTER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

IN THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST



WORTHY AND RESPECTABLE

At a meeting of the Catholic Baptist Society in
Cumberland, holden on the 16th day of September,
A. D. 1796.

Resolved, That their committee wait on the Rev.
JONATHAN MAXCY, with the thanks of this Society,
for the excellent and well-adapted Discourse he de-
livered at the dedication of their Meeting-House, on
the 14th instant, and request of him a copy for the
press.

A true copy from the records:

Witness,

SETH CAPRON, Clerk.



TO THE
WORTHY AND RESPECTABLE
S O C I E T Y,

AT WHOSE REQUEST THE FOLLOWING

S E R M O N

WAS PREACHED,

AND IS NOW PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC,

IT IS MOST

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

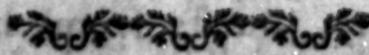
BY THEIR SINCERE FRIEND,

AND VERY

HUMBLE SERVANT,

J. MAXCY.

A
S E R M O N



GENESIS xxviii. 17.

This is none other but the house of God; and this is the gate of Heaven.

A BELIEF in the existence of God, and in his intercourse with rational creatures, has pervaded all ages and nations. Every temple that has been built, every victim that has been slain, all the rites of paganism, and all the institutions of Christianity, bear testimony in favour of this assertion. The various and opposite methods in which men have attempted to approach God, to render him their worship and to receive his favours, evince that they were ignorant of their true state by nature, of the divine attributes, and of the great Mediator, through whom all blessings descend. Inspiration assures us, that "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. ii. 5. Through him every true Christian, worshipping in spirit and in truth, looks up to God as his parent, and receives di-

vine favours. Intercourse in this way with God, is a peculiar privilege of every real believer, and a distinguishing trait in his character. It marks his progress through life. It bears him above immoderate attachment to earthly, perishable objects, sublimates his soul, invigorates his affections, enlarges his capacity of enjoyment, and qualifies him for the service of heaven. While he sits under the shadow of the Almighty, his ravished soul, struggling with extasy, bursts from her confines of clay, joining with "angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect." His religion is not founded on conjecture; it is no idle formality, no uninteresting speculation; but it is a truth, a substance, a heart-felt reality, a heaven on earth. All the operations of the divine spirit, in regeneration, repentance, faith, sanctification and communion with God, are indications of his favour, and incontestible evidences of the reality of vital piety. Though reason abundantly confirms the divine original of the Christian religion, and points it out as the only road to glory; yet reason is by no means the chief source from which believers in general derive their assurance and consolation. They assent, because they realize. They believe, because they feel. They rest assured, because they have the evidence of their internal senses. "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself." 1 John, v. 10. He who has been brought by the power of God to a cordial reception of the gospel, can no more doubt the reality of religion, than he can the existence of the material world. In both cases he relies on the veracity of his sensible experience. How absurd then and vain is it, for those who possess no real knowledge

knowledge of religion, to represent it as a phantom, a cheat, or delusion! With the same propriety might a deaf man deny the existence of sound, or a blind man the existence of light and colours. Christians, in all ages and countries, have the happiness to "know in whom they have believed." God is limited neither by time nor place. He often comes sensibly near to his people by day and by night, on the ocean or on the land, in the populous city or in the lonely desert. Behold Jacob, taking leave of his aged father, flying from the rage of an incensed brother, having no one to accompany him through a strange country. The sun falls beneath the horizon. Darkness spreads over the earth, and muffles up the sky. Jacob in the open air lays his head upon a stone. He sleeps. In this exposed and solitary state, his heavenly Father meets him, and fills him with consolation. God says to him, "behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and said, "surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."—"How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."—You will please to observe that Jacob utters these words while his heart is filled with a lively sense of God's presence. It is on this account that he calls the place in which he was the house of God, and the gate of heaven. It is on the same account that the scriptures represent the church as the house of God. I propose, therefore, on the present occasion, to accommodate the words of the text to the meaning of those phrases in the scriptures, which speak of the church as an habitation for God. In discussing the subject presented in the text, I shall in the

I. First

I. First place, shew what constitutes a church that may be stiled the house of God.

II. In the second place, consider the church as a state preparatory for heaven.

A few observations shall then conclude the subject.

I. I shall in the first place shew what constitutes a church that may be stiled the house of God.

Under this head, I do not propose to point out all the particular things necessary to the organization, instruction, and government of a church; but the nature of it, considered as an habitation for God. A church consists of a number of real believers in Christ, united together under his laws, for the worship and service of God. The following are some of the leading traits in their characters:

1. They have experienced regeneration. This is expressed in the scriptures by various phrases, tending to point out its greatness and importance. Christ represented it under the notion of a birth, when he said to Nicodemus, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Paul represented it as "the putting off and crucifixion of the old man, as the destruction of the body of sin, as a restoration from death, as a renovation of the spirit of the mind, as a new creation." The necessity of this change originates in the depravity and sinfulness of the human heart. These are abundantly testified of in the scriptures, and confirmed by the conduct of men in all ages and nations. The testimony of eternal truth is, that men have all gone out of the way; that there is none that doeth good; that there is no fear of God before their eyes; that they desire not the knowledge of his ways; that they have come short of his glory;

glory; that the carnal mind is enmity against God; that every thought of the imagination of man's heart is evil, and that continually. These expressions convey an idea of the greatest alienation of heart from God and holiness. Though all men are sinners, yet all are not equally criminal, obstinate and incorrigible. All, however, are by nature in such a state as to need a renovation of heart to fit them for the house of God, and the enjoyment of heaven. He whose soul is the haunt of wickedness, whose passions are the vile minions of riot and debauchery, whose life is a catalogue of sins; he can be roused from his lethargy by nothing but the loudest thunders of Sinai, and be changed to holiness by nothing but the restless arm of the Almighty. The essence of this change consists neither in the illumination of the understanding, nor in the reception of any new faculties; but in the infusion of a holy disposition, prompting to holy exercises of heart and conduct in life. The great work of regeneration is by the scriptures uniformly ascribed to the Holy Spirit, as the immediate agent. Thus said Christ, "except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit." John iii. 5, 6. John, speaking of those who received Christ, says they were "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John i. 13. Paul to the Corinthians says, "we all beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Cor. iii. 18. Paul to Titus says of God, "he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Tit. iii. 5. The Spirit of
B
God

God sheds abroad his love in the heart, and conveys to it the same kind of disposition which resides in himself. Hence he who is regenerated, is united to God in love. "For God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." 1 John, iv. 16. Hence it is, that all who are regenerated, "are built up a spiritual house." None but such can properly belong to it, and constitute an habitation for the living God. Thus regeneration appears to be an essential trait in the character of true members, who form a church that may be styled the house of God.

2. The next trait in their character is, that they have true repentance for sin. This is indispensibly necessary to pardon and salvation. This was the uniform language of John the Baptist; of Jesus Christ, and his apostles. John "preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Jesus taught "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations." The apostles preached the same doctrine, when they said, "repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins." Evangelical repentance consists not in occasional pangs of remorse, horrors of conscience, or resolutions to amend. If it does, then a Judas, a Felix, and a Herod, must be numbered with the pious, and be enrolled on the list of salvation. There are scarcely any, who, at some period of their lives, have not been alarmed with fearful apprehensions for the consequences of sin, have reformed their conduct, and implored forgiveness of God. These things they may have done, and yet be entire strangers to true repentance. This penetrates the inmost retirements of the heart. It
 100
 consists

consists in a holy disgust of sin, considered as a most heinous crime against God, and prompts the true penitent not merely to view sinful actions with abhorrence, but to trace them up to their origin, and disclose all the secret recesses of wickedness. Even when his conduct is fair and unblameable in the eyes of the world, he laments over the depravity of his heart. He possesses a deep and affecting sense of the intrinsic evil of sin; and opposes it, not merely because it exposes to punishment, not merely because it would injure his character, and squander his estate, but chiefly because he views it to be vile in its own nature, ruinous to his peace in its tendency, dishonourable to God, rebellion against his authority, opposition to his holiness and goodness. That repentance cannot be considered as genuine, which does not produce a uniform disgust of all sin, in every kind and degree; while it prompts to an invincible perseverance in every known duty, and an humble dependence on the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ. Repentance, as it implies an entire change of motives, feelings and actions, respecting sin, is an indispensable prerequisite to the enjoyment of God and heaven. Salvation without it, appears highly irrational and absurd. For God to receive one without repentance, would be to receive one as a friend whom he knew to be an enemy. Hence it appears necessary, that all who belong to God's house, should have true repentance for sin.

3. Another trait in their character is, that they possess true evangelical faith. By this we are to understand a firm persuasion of all revealed truth; a persuasion effected in the understanding by divine testimony, and wrought into the heart by the influences

influences of the Divine Spirit. Hence it appears, that genuine faith is no dormant uninteresting principle, leaving the possessor in a state of languor and indifference; but active, producing good works, assuring of justification and eternal life. Paul says, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." According to this definition, it appears to be a kind of divine internal sense, diffusing itself into futurity, conversing with distant invisible objects, bringing them home into present enjoyment, substantiating them to the mind, and laying a firm and immovable foundation for hope. Evangelical faith has more immediate reference to Christ in his various offices; to all parts of his work as Mediator, Redeemer and Saviour; to his righteousness as the only ground of acceptance with God; to divine mercy through Christ; for the pardon of sin; for the sanctification of the heart; for growth in heavenly life; for complete deliverance from evil, and instatement in eternal beatitude. Hence the scriptures represent faith as "working by love." No wonder that it does; for it brings into view God's most holy character in the great scheme of redemption by Jesus Christ, and describes all the glorious realities of the heavenly state. When the heart is reconciled by divine grace, the soul not only apprehends God's character, but approves it, loves and admires it, as infinitely excellent, and longs to be changed into the same image. Faith works by love towards men. It displays itself in kind benevolent affection, especially to "the household of faith." It embraces, "with arms of love," all good men of every denomination, and views them as children of God, and heirs of glory. The
 scriptures

scriptures represent faith as "purifying the heart." This effect appears necessarily to result from its nature. We are so constituted, as readily to assimilate ourselves to those objects about which we are conversant. As faith brings into our view and enjoyment things heavenly and holy, it changes us "into their image, from glory to glory." Victory over the world is another effect ascribed to faith. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." As faith brings into view things of eternal weight and importance, the world, with all its pomp and pageantry, recedes and dwindles to a point. The soul rises above it, and soaring towards the divine nature, is lost in its immensity and glory. Thus it appears that faith is an exalted grace, and fits its subjects for the house of God.

4. Another trait in their character is, devotedness of heart to God. This implies a cordial approbation of his character, laws and government. As all true religion is seated in the heart, the source of action and virtue, devotedness of heart implies a constant obedience of all the affections to the divine will, and an external practical observance of all the duties, religious and moral. He who has been born from above, whose heart has been filled with sincere godly sorrow for sin, who depends for salvation entirely on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, considers himself not as his own, but as "bought with a price;" and endeavours to glorify God in body and spirit. He does not consider religion as a task, but as a pleasure. He finds that the Saviour's "yoke is easy, and his burthen light." He rejoices to possess religion

in his heart, purifying his affections, and fitting him for the house of God.

5. Another trait in the character of those who compose the true church, styled the house of God, is, that God's glory is the highest object in their view and regard. His nature is the sum of all excellence and perfection. It contains every thing that can attract the affections, excite the admiration, and call forth the praises of all holy beings. "God is love." With this all his actions, and all his treatment of rational creatures, will perfectly correspond. For God can do nothing contrary to himself. All his arrangements and operations, in the great works of creation, in the great kingdoms of providence and grace, are calculated to effect a perfect display of his true character, and to secure the highest happiness of the rational universe. A display of God's true character is his glory. Those then who are real friends to God, must feel a disposition to coincide with all his designs and operations.

6. Another trait in their character is, that they strive for higher attainments in the divine life. The principle of this is implanted in the heart in regeneration. Under the influences of the Holy Spirit, it is increased and brought forth in all its operations. This life implies an inward propensity to holiness, and a divine activity in all the powers of the soul. It is, in its nature, tendency and effects, utterly opposed to sin. It implies an elevation of the affections towards God, and a progressive advancement towards heaven. "It is a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." It is communicated from Christ to all his sincere disciples. They look to him as the exhaustless fountain,

tain, and eagerly anticipate the glorious period when they shall be changed into his image, and satiated with his fulness.

Various other things enter into the character of those who are real members of the house of God. Those I have enumerated appear the most essential. For all who have experienced them, feel united together, and when worshipping their common Parent and Saviour, are sensible of his presence, and can exclaim, "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

II. I now proceed, in the second place, to consider the church as a preparatory state for heaven.

The design of religion is to meliorate the hearts, reform the manners, and save the souls of men. For these important ends, Jesus descended from heaven, and founded the church on that rock, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. His design was to purify the hearts of men, in a state of discipline and enjoyment, and thus prepare them for the sublime delights of heaven. That we may view the state of the church in the present world as preparatory for happiness and glory in the next, we need but consider them in a comparative point of light.

1. If we consider the church as a state of society, it will appear preparatory for heaven. In this point of view, it appears peculiarly accommodated to man, as a rational, communicative being. Not only his necessities and dependencies, but his natural instincts, impel him into society. Neither the beauties of nature, nor the inventions of art, can dissipate the gloom, nor alleviate the irksomeness, of perpetual solitude. The pleasures of social intercourse hold an elevated rank in the scale
of

of man's enjoyments. They expand his affections, enlarge his capacity, refine his nature, and learn him to guide his conduct by the rules of decency and propriety. If such are the effects and enjoyments resulting from the society of men possessing different inclinations, pursuing different objects, and aiming at different ends—what that is truly excellent, amiable and delightful, may we not expect from the society of those, who imbibe the same spirit, possess the same moral temper, join in the same worship, and strive for the same heaven? Men in a church state are united by the nearest ties; ties founded in love. “Being knit together in love, they hold the head from which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, increaseth with the increase of God.” Col. ii. 2, 19. Heaven appears to be the continuance and perfection of that happiness which is begun in the social state of the church on earth. Here we are surrounded with numerous imperfections, liable to many difficulties and animosities; but in heaven, these will cease; perfect union will take place; a more extensive society will commence; the affections will be enlarged beyond all bounds; all hearts will leap with extasy; each, happy in itself, and in that “great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.” Thus the church state, in the present world, considered as a society, appears to be the gate of heaven.

2. The church, considered as a state of progression in knowledge and holiness, is preparatory for heaven.

Those who have experienced the great change of regeneration, are brought to a particular knowledge

ledge of God, and in a degree assimilated to his nature. In these consists the highest excellency of the Christian religion. It imparts to men the dispositions and moral qualities of God. These at first are drawn in small characters, but under the light of truth, they enlarge and rise into view, till Deity stands confessed in man. "We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." 2 Cor. iii. 18. That men in the present obscure and sinful state need some particular knowledge of God, and some change of their moral temper into his likeness, before they can be prepared to enjoy him, is a truth too reasonable and obvious to require much illustration. The church state is a dispensation of light and holiness, by which men are trained up as in a family, under one common parent, and fitted for heaven. It is by the gospel only, that men can acquire true and saving knowledge of God. By the works of creation they may learn his existence, power, wisdom and goodness; by the law of Moses they may learn his holiness, justice, and opposition to sin; but it is by the gospel only that they learn his mercy, in the forgiveness of transgression, and in the salvation of the soul. In Christ they behold him under the endearing character of Father. Under him, they are here in a church state trained up as his children, growing in his knowledge, forming into his likeness, and looking forward to the mansions of glory. Knowledge of God appears to be an indispensable prerequisite to eternal life. Christ says, "this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John xvii. 3. From the scriptures it appears, that

the knowledge and enjoyment of Christ will constitute an essential part of the happiness of the saints in heaven. They will see him as he is; they will dwell with him; he will lead them by the waters of life; he will be their everlasting light and glory. In these respects the house of God appears to be the gate of heaven; for all its inhabitants know and enjoy Christ. They receive him as God and man, as a prophet to instruct them, as a friend to increase their consolations, as a king to reign over them, and protect them from all their enemies. "They grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour." They have a special knowledge of the Holy Spirit, illuminating their understandings, sanctifying their hearts, assuring them of pardon, justification and eternal life. They will pass on from one degree of improvement to another, till they shall be ushered into the full enjoyment of eternal beatitude. Various other circumstances might be mentioned, and considerations adduced, to present the church as preparatory for heaven; but the narrow limits prescribed by the present occasion, urge me to finish this subject with some observations.

1. From the first part of this discourse, we learn what are the most essential traits in the character of those who are fit to become members of the house or church of God; and consequently, that if we admit those of dissimilar character, we deviate from Christianity and vital religion. For if we consider those as belonging to the house of God who have not been born from above, we consider those to be fit to worship him, who, according to the declaration of Christ, cannot enter his kingdom. How then could a church, composed of
such

such characters, be considered as the temple of God, or the gate of heaven? How could those be fit to enjoy God in that holy mansion, who on earth had no delight in him? The requirements of the gospel are all reasonable and consistent, suited to the nature of God, and the state of man. Men are required to repent, because this reconciles them to God, and leads them to view sin as God views it. Men are required to exercise faith in Christ, because this implies an acknowledgment of him in all his characters, works and offices; and consequently a cordial approbation of salvation through his mediation. Men are required to devote their whole hearts to God, to do all things for his glory, and strive for heaven. How reasonable are these things! If complied with, how conducive to our happiness! How can we expect to enjoy God, unless we love him supremely? Heaven, to an impenitent heart, would be like the richest banquet to the sick. Is it not then of the greatest importance for us to enquire whether we are born from above? Whether we sincerely repent of our sins? Whether we strive to oppose the wickedness of our hearts? Whether we receive and approve the Saviour? Whether we depend on him for salvation and eternal life? Unless we do these things, we delude ourselves, if we entertain hopes of heaven. For common sense teaches us, that we cannot enjoy an object, unless our disposition be assimilated to its nature. How then ought our attention to be excited, that we be reconciled to God? Will neither the terrors of eternal darkness, nor the charms of eternal light, rouse us from our lethargy? Shall Jesus divest himself of his heavenly radiance? Shall he descend to earth in the form of a servant? Shall
he

he agonize and die upon the cross? Shall he descend into the dreary mansions of the grave, and dethrone the king of terrors? Shall he ascend on high, amidst the shouts of admiring angels, and fling wide open the gates of Paradise for men? Shall he disclose to our view the ever-verdant tree of life, bending with the food of archangels, and spreading its branches for the "healing of the nations?" Shall the glorious Saviour do all these things for us, and we remain unmoved and impenitent? God forbid. Let us receive him as our Lord and Master. We shall then look towards heaven as our proper residence. We shall anticipate its joys, and triumph over the ruins of sin. We shall leap with pleasure at the approach of our emancipation. Our hearts will expand with rapture in the prospect of that period, when the Saviour, standing amidst his ransomed millions, shall lift the sword of victory, and the pale horse of death shall shrink into darkness—never, never to strike his houghs in the vale of immortality! Then will an ocean of love, broad as the circuit of the spheres, roll down from the throne of God, and bear off the redeemed multitude to that delightful country, where sin, and pain, and death, and sorrow, never had a name.

2. The second observation which I make from the preceding discourse is, that if the church is a state designed by God, and calculated to prepare men for heaven, the maintenance of public worship must be of the highest importance. In the ordinary course of Divine Providence, we are not to expect that men will become virtuous and good, without the means of instruction and information.

God

God appears, in all things respecting this world, to operate by secondary causes. In all the means which he has established in the ministration of the gospel, there appears to be a tendency to holiness and virtue. If this be not the case, why are the means appointed? If there be not greater probability that those who hear the gospel will become good, than there is that those who do not hear it will, why is it to be preached? If men expect to be saved by the gospel, they must attend its ministration. "For faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We must assemble for the worship of God, and enquire in his temple. If God point out the road to heaven, and we refuse to walk in it, can we without the greatest absurdity expect to arrive in that happy mansion? As reasonably might we expect, that by descending into the earth we should light upon the sun, or become companions of the stars.—Your exertions in this place for the establishment and support of public worship, evince your sense of its importance. Permit me to congratulate you on the success with which your efforts have been crowned. The liberality of your institution does honour to human nature. Like heaven, you receive men of all denominations, without regard to any thing but their goodness. May no standard ever be lifted here to call forth the spirit of party, but may you live together in peace, forbearing and forgiving one another. Let all things be done with decency, prudence and moderation. May you all enjoy the blessings of salvation, and while worshipping your common Parent, enjoy his sensible presence, so that with unfeigned fervour of soul you may exclaim,

claim, "this is none other but the house of God,
 "and this is the gate of heaven." I now commend
 you to him who is able to keep you, and lead you
 into all truth. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be
 of one mind, live in peace, and the God of peace
 shall be with you.

A M E N.



